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Some Remarks about the Idea of 'A Second Japan' in 20th Century Polish Political Thought

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ABSTRACT

The article discusses several examples of Japan's presence in the Polish discourses on modernization in the first decades of the twentieth century. Significant figures from across the Polish political and cultural spectrum referred to Japan as a model of successful modernization. Several Polish leaders (such as Józef Piłsudski and Roman Dmowski) travelled to Japan during the Russo-Japanese war in 1904 and sought support for their rival visions of Poland's future. Four prime ministers of the re-created Polish state after 1918 had been trained by Japanese operatives at a secret intelligence training centre in Switzerland. Several other important Polish political, cultural and religious figures travelled and lived in Japan in the first half of the twentieth century – each of them became impressed by different aspects of Japanese culture and society. Notable examples of Poles profoundly influenced by Japanese culture include journalists and writers (such as Wacław Sieroszewski and Aleksander Janta-Połczyński), a former political prisoner turned ethnologist (Bronisław Piłsudski), and a Roman Catholic priest (Maksymilian Maria Kolbe). In many of their accounts, Japan was presented as an example of successful modernization, where Western and Eastern values co-existed in a supposedly harmonious manner.

KEYWORDS

Japan; Poland; modernization; nationalism; Orientalism; national identity

Introduction

Both Poland and Japan celebrate their Day of Constitution on 3 May (commemorating their constitutions enacted, respectively, in 1791 and 1947), but important symbolic connections between both nations do not stop there. Japan as a model of modernization has been an important point of reference in Polish modern political thought.

By means of introductory remarks, let us suggest the Polish perspectives on Japan have been strongly influenced, in multiple ways, by the multi-faceted phenomenon of 'Orientalization'. 'Orientalism', as described by Edward Said, amounts to an overtly stereotypical, essentialist perception and representation of the cultures of the 'East' by the 'West'.[1] The perception of Japan in Poland has been strongly filtered through the Orientalist lens: a country in the Asian Far East viewed from a country in East-Central Europe with a strong sense of identification with the culture and values of Western Europe. However, we also need to problematize the Orientalist relationship: in the course of the twentieth century, in some ways Japan came to symbolize many 'Western' values of capitalist modernization in the Polish eyes. At the same time, Poland has been the object of Orientalization too: for centuries Poland itself has been viewed as a part of

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Europe's East rather than the West. Arguably, 'East' and 'West' tend to be highly relative, flexible and fluid categories.

The semi-peripheral status of Poland in the European context meant that for the last two centuries (at least), the intellectual and political debates have been dominated by the issue of modernization: leaving behind the shackles of underdevelopment and backwardness. Choosing the right path of modernization has been the key dilemma in Polish political and intellectual debates and Japan became a significant point of reference in such debates at several important points in Polish history, especially in the early 1900s (and again in the 1980s when Lech Wałęsa's slogan about building 'a second Japan' in Poland became popular). During both these periods Poland was not an independent country, it was dominated by neighbouring powers,[2] which provided plenty of room for imagining the future form of the state and looking for models – the Japanese case as a point of reference comes into play here. It might serve as an illustration of the attractiveness of the Japanese social, political and economic model in Poland throughout the twentieth century.

Throughout the 19th and twentieth century Polish historians and political thinkers pondered the reasons for the collapse of the Polish state in the 1790s. One of the most often invoked reasons was the lack of reforms and the stagnation of the inward looking social and political order: while Poland had a long history of independent statehood, the short-lived Constitution of 1791 was deemed a noble effort which came too late (Poland re-emerged as a parliamentary democracy in 1918). In the context of these debates the Japanese reforms of the Meiji era seemed the successful example of how the political modernization and constitutional democracy could work for the benefit of the nation's survival and development.

As a matter of fact, Poland had a long tradition of parliamentary representation over the centuries, going back to the Middle Ages. During the period of the 'democracy of the gentry' (demokracja szlachecka), the Diet (Sejm) became the central institution of the state, to the point of overshadowing and sometimes even paralysing the monarchy. However, the principle of parliamentary unanimity (liberum veto) negatively impacted the efficiency of the political system unable to reform itself in the course of the 17th and eighteenth century and ultimately contributed to its collapse. At the time of the Meiji reforms and the introduction of parliamentary rule in Japan, Poland was deprived of its own parliament and national independence (during the period of the partitions, some Polish leaders participated in limited forms of parliamentary representation existing in the political systems of the occupying powers, Russia, Germany and Austro-Hungary). Therefore, the success of the Meiji reforms was noted and observed by Polish public opinion with much awe or, perhaps, envy.

Poland and the Russo–Japanese war

Although both countries are seemingly separated by a large physical and cultural distance, the Polish writer and political figure, Wiesław Górnicki remarked paradoxically: 'For us, Poles, Japan is almost a neighbouring country.'[3] A key factor in Górnicki's paradoxical formulation has been both nations' direct neighbourhood with Russia (including the complex challenges resulting from the neighbourhood). The comment was made by the author in the context of reflections about the 1904 Russian-Japanese war, which awoke Polish hopes for weaking Russian imperial power through the Japanese victory and re-ignited Polish aspirations for independence. In the words of Andrzej Tomczyk, 'The Polish public opinion during that period was simply enthusiastic about the Japanese successes in the war against Russia.'[4] Górnicki was a member of the entourage of pro-Soviet Polish Communist dictator General Wojciech Jaruzelski on a state visit to Japan in 1987, but the relevant chapter in his memoirs (published in 1994) is largely dominated by reflections on the history of Polish-Japanese contacts (with Russia as the ever-present third actor) in the late 19th and early twentieth century. Górnicki even reminiscences how Jaruzelski, during a

work meeting in Tokyo at 4:15 am, in no uncertain terms specifically ordered him to delete any, even indirect, references to the historical Polish-Japanese relations in the General's draft speech at a banquet in the imperial Akasaka palace, which might make Russians (Soviets) anxious.[5] Jaruzelski reportedly admonished his advisor by saying: 'Do you want to create an impression of a Polish-Japanese brotherhood of arms? (…) I am surprised by your naivety. The journalists will write I referred to a common struggle of the Poles and the Japanese against Russia, they won't notice anything else.'[6] In the words of Górnicki, 'Two sentences duly disappeared from the draft text of the toast.'[7]

Japan as a model of national success in the 1900s

On another level, though, the Polish interest in Japan went beyond the geopolitical factor. Japan was held up as a model of successful social modernization combined with a strong attachment to tradition: arguably, a major preoccupation of Polish intellectuals and political thinkers in the last century. Thus the title of a book about the Japanese modernization published in 1972, which largely summed up the Polish perception of the Japanese path to modernization: 'The challenge of the enlightened samurai'.[8] The book was written by Włodzimierz Wowczuk, himself born and raised in the Polish community of Harbin and a witness of dramatic historical events in the region of East Asia in the first half of the twentieth century.

The first upsurge in Polish interest in Japanese politics and culture, which accompanied the rise of Japanese power and peaked in the first decade of the twentieth century, was reflected by numerous publications in the Polish press. A key example of that phenomenon was 'Tygodnik Ilustrowany' (The Illustrated Weekly), one of the most widely read Polish newspapers of the era. The weekly steadily increased its coverage of Japanese affairs since the 1880s. It portrayed a strongly positive image of the country and its inhabitants. According to Barbara Klassa, 'from the information presented on the pages of the newspaper emerges an image of the Japanese as a very hard-working and disciplined nation, highly efficient in reaching a planned goal, at the same time as a civilized nation, highly valuing its honour.'[9] Until the late 1880s, the coverage presented Japan as a country which was trying to emulate Europe. Since the 1890s, however, many of the articles eulogized a perceived superiority of Japan over Europe in different spheres of social life, e.g. the successful minimalization of child mortality.[10] Polish authors admired Japan's 'unusually quick leap from feudalism and natural economy to capitalism'.[11] In the words of Wacław Sieroszewski, writing in the Illustrated Weekly in 1903, 'Japan defied all the economic theories.'[12] Overall, 'an image of Japan as an ideal country emerges' from Sieroszewski's account.[13]

The dialectics of change and continuity was a frequent feature of the writings about Japan published on the pages of the Polish weekly. In this vein, an anonymous author argued in 1904: 'despite numerous social and political reforms, the core of the Japanese culture has not been radically transformed. In this sense, only the form has changed, while the essence has been left untouched.'[14] Arguably, the centrality of the relative advantages of modernization and tradition applied to the case of Japan was a reflection of the debates about modernization and tradition in Poland itself.

In 1904, Inazo Nitobe's book 'Bushido. Soul of Japan' (originally published in Tokio in 1899) was translated into Polish and published in the majority-Polish city of Lwów (which at the time was a part of Austro-Hungary). Interestingly, Nitobe himself visited Poland during his European travels and wrote a preface to the book's Polish edition in which he attempted to relate traditional Japanese vocabulary to the Polish tradition: '"daimyo" and "samurai" will reveal their meaning to the Polish readers when we will compare them to the Polish "kasztelan" and "starosta".'[15] Nitobe's book was reportedly a success among the Polish audience. According to Robert Gembal, it 'excited and ignited the minds of the Polish endeks in the beginning of the

twentieth century'[16] (the term 'endek' denotes an activist of National Democracy, a right-wing nationalist movement which emerged at the turn of the century).

In 1905, another important book about Japan was published in Polish translation, namely Okakura Kakuzo's 'The Awakening of Japan', translated from English by Maria Wentzlowa, published by the prestigious Gebethner and Wolff publishing house and distributed as a gift to the subscribers of the above-mentioned Illustrated Weekly. The translator's preface once again highlights a strong interest in the combination of the Western-style modernization and the indigenous (Eastern) traditions, echoing the dilemmas discussed by Polish intellectuals. According to Wentzlowa, 'The strength and development of Japan, which has so strongly manifested itself in recent times, undoubtedly result from learning the civilization and science of the West; however, as a moral force, a strength of characters, displayed by outstanding representatives of the nation and even by simple soldiers, it has resulted from (…) the mix of the doctrines of Confucius and of the Buddha.'[17] In this context, alluding to Poland's own situation and potential, Wentzlowa ascertained: '(…) we have a rich treasure of that kind of strength (…)! Those treasures are available for the simple man even in our national customs, traditions and faith, one just needs to study them, love them and implement them.'[18] Thus, a publication of a book about Japan was intended as a tool towards strengthening Polish identity and Polish patriotic sentiments.[19]

Józef Piłsudski and Roman Dmowski in Tokyo

In 1904, two key Polish leaders of the first half of the twentieth century, Józef Piłsudski and Roman Dmowski, simultanously travelled to Japan where they promoted rival visions of the Polish-Japanese relationship – and of Poland's future. As a leader of the underground Polish Socialist Party (Polska Partia Socjalistyczna, PPS), which sought a break-up of the Russian empire, Piłsudski looked for Japanese help in organizing an uprising against the Russian forces in Poland. The negotiations between Japanese officials and the Polish Socialists had begun with a visit by one of the PPS leaders, Witold Jodko-Narkiewicz, to the Japanese embassy in London where he held talks with Ambassador Hayashi Tadasu. The contacts were directly supervised by the imperial minister of foreign affairs, Komura Jutaro. Subsequently, Piłsudski himself (together with another key Socialist leader, Tytus Filipowicz, a future Polish diplomat) was invited to Japan for further talks by the deputy chief of the General Staff, General Kodama Gentaro.[20]

Dmowski (the leader and ideologue of the right-wing National Democratic movement) wanted the opposite - to discourage the Japanese from the idea of assisting the Polish revolutionaries. To this day, Piłsudski and Dmowski remain symbols of two competing versions of Polish national identity and statehood (civic identity vs. ethno-nationalism), which dominated Polish political imagery well into the twenty first century.[21] They accidentally bumped into each other in a Tokyo street and it is a little known fact that the only in depth conversation between these two lifelong rivals (lasting for nine hours), a confrontation of two visions of Poland, took place in the capital of Japan on 13 July 1904: one might say the Japanese context informed the historic, even if inconclusive, discussion on the future of Poland.[22]

It is clear the visit to Japan had some impact on both leaders, but it is easier to demonstrate it in the case of Dmowski who left behind a much larger legacy of political writings (while Piłsudski left his imprint on history as a military commander and the leader of the Polish state in 1918–21 and 1926–35). As Dmowski increasingly drifted towards fascism in the course of the 1920s and 1930s, he mostly invoked Japan as a model of strong social discipline, a nationalistic ethos rooted in obedience and collectivism. For example, he devoted more than 50 pages to a lengthy chapter about Japan in his 1933 book 'Przewrot' (The Breakthrough). He went as far as writing: 'The current centre of energy of this world, Japan, today represents the most independent and most active political power.'[23] Arguably, there are few equally enthusiastic statements about Japan made by leaders of major political movements in Europe in the first decades of the

twentieth century, even though Dmowski's position may have been fundamentally, morally and ideologically, flawed.

In the case of the Polish left of the Piłsudskite orientation, the Japanese influence was less often pronounced in the form of political tracts, but it was felt, too, both on the level of cultural references and political action.

While the Japanese authorities did not accept all of Piłsudski's proposals in 1904 (such as the formation of a Polish Legion in the Far East, composed of Polish prisoners of war and deserters from the Russian army) fearing Germany's negative reaction, they did give some support to the anti-Russian revolutionaries of the Polish Socialist Party in the form of financial subsidies (to the sum of over 20,000 British pounds) which were used to purchase fire arms, smuggled into the Russian-occupied part Poland by Filipowicz and Stanisław Wojciechowski (the future president of Poland in 1922–26). Importantly – Japanese intelligence provided the Polish revolutionaries with paramilitary trainings at a clandestine centre in Switzerland, using Japanese patterns of organization. The trainees later served as the nucleus of the future Polish army (the Polish Legions on the Austro-Hungarian side during the First World War) and top-level officials of the resurrected Polish state after 1918. As Górnicki noted, as many as four Polish Prime Ministers in the interwar period (1918–1939) had been trained by the Japanese intelligence operatives near Lausanne before 1914.[24] Thus the connection with Japan established by Józef Piłsudski in 1904 had a very tangible impact on the formation of the future Polish military-political elite.

Japanese tropes in the oeuvres of Polish writers

It is important to mention the significant references to Japan and Japanese culture present in the work of Polish writers (especially protagonists of the modernist literary movement Young Poland), supporters of pro-independence efforts, who forged much of the imagery underpinning the shape of the Polish identity in the first decades of the twentieth century and later occupied an important place in the cultural and political establishment of the post-1918 independent Republic of Poland.

Thus, Władysław Reymont (who went on to win the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1924) wrote a short story entitled 'Komurasaki', published in the fashionable literary journal 'Chimera' in 1901. According to Katarzyna Deja, 'it was the first Polish literary work devoted to a Japanese topic.[25] Deja argues the short story reflected Reymont's 'response to contemporary political or social issues', in this case: the issue of intolerance and the need for openness to the cultural influence of the Far East.[26]

Stefan Żeromski was one of the most significant Polish patriotic writers of his generation and authored several novels which until today serve as a point of reference in debates about Polish history narratives. His place in the pantheon of national culture after 1918 was sealed by the fact of being allocated a flat in Warsaw's Royal Castle, one of the central symbolic sites of Polish history. In the 1900s, as a supporter of the Socialist movement he shared Piłsudski's longing for a Polish military insurrection which would bring about a resurrection of Poland as an independent state. In a characteristic short story 'Sen o szpadzie' (A Dream about the Sword), written in 1906 and published in the underground Socialist press, Żeromski referred to the ethos of a fictional Japanese military officer who sacrificed his life fighting for his country during the war against Russia and, before being shot as a spy, asked for his remaining money to be donated to the International Red Cross.[27] According to Żeromski, the Polish revolutionaries (the would-be future Polish soldiers) should take inspiration from the selflessness and bravery present in Japanese identity. In his words, 'the world was in awe the Japanese cause was a victorious one.'[28] According to Żeromski's biographers, the short story was inspired by a real case of a Japanese officer, Jokohawa, executed by the Russians for his role in sabotage activities in Manchuria.[29]

Bronisław Piłsudski (Józef's older brother) was a political prisoner of the Russian Tzarist regime.[30] As a student in St. Petersburg he had been implicated in a plot to kill the Tzar, Alexander III. Initially sentenced to death, his sentence was commuted to fifteen years of hard labour in the Sakhalin.[31] After years in the Far East, he became a leading researcher and advocate for the Ainu minority culture in Russia and Japan. After a spell in Tokyo, he eventually returned to Europe in 1905, settled first in Krakow, then Geneva and Paris where he worked for the Polish National Committee and died just a few months before Poland finally regained her independence in 1918.

Bronisław Piłsudski is not a well-known figure today, only in recent years, a century since his tragic death, he has attracted some more attention in his home country, e.g. through exhibitions organized at the Manggha Museum of Japanese Art and Technology in Krakow (2018) and at the Ethnographic Museum in Warsaw (2021).[32] Nevertheless, Bronisław Piłsudski's serious legacy as an anthropologist and ethnographer must not be underestimated. In the 1900s, he authored numerous articles about Japan, including an optimistic assessment of the modernizing process leading towards democracy: 'The times are changing. The old authorities are falling down. Japan is entering a new era, when the exercise of state power will pass into the hands of a generation brought up and educated in the ideals of a more democratic Europe.'[33] Arguably, Piłsudski's statement was a reflection of what he hoped for his native Poland and not only for Japan.

A self-taught pioneer of the method of participant-observation, Piłsudski did not just study the Ainu, he fully immersed himself in the community and its culture, which included marrying an Ainu women and starting a family with two children. Piłsudski's approach to the Ainu (and to the other indigenous peoples he encountered in East Asia) was characterized by a deep empathy and a radical commitment to their well-being and emancipation. Upon return to Europe, he shared his experiences with Bronisław Malinowski.[34] Malinowski developed the participant-observation methodology in his later study of the Polynesian cultures which earned him global fame as a founding father of modern social anthropology.

The already mentioned acclaimed Polish writer Stefan Żeromski portrayed Bronisław Piłsudski (as Gustaw Bezmian) as a character in his 1912 novel 'Uroda życia' (The Beauty of Life).

Another writer and political activist of the patriotic-socialist persuasion who was strongly influenced by Japanese cultural patterns was Wacław Sieroszewski (already mentioned as an author of articles about Japan on the pages of the Illustrated Weekly). Having spent many years as an exile in the Russian Far East (as punishment for his involvement in anti-Tzarist Socialist activity) he became immersed in the local East Asian languages and cultures. In 1903, he moved to Hokkaido and later to Tokyo: together with Bronisław Piłsudski he conducted pioneering anthropological research on the Ainu minority and became acquainted with Japanese cultural and political milieus.

Sieroszewski returned to Poland *via* Korea and China just in time for the revolutionary upheaval of 1905. He joined the Polish Legions (led by Józef Piłsudski) as a volunteer in 1914 and in 1918 as a leader of the National Independence Party became the Minister of Information and Propaganda in the newly formed Provisional Government of the Republic of Poland. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, Sieroszewski remained one of the most respected members of the Polish literary and political establishment, serving as a key member both of the Polish Writers' Union and of the Senate (the Polish Parliament's upper chamber).

While maintaining his intense Polish patriotism as well as high-level political engagement, in his numerous novels Sieroszewski constantly returned to the nostalgic imagery and reality of the Far East, including Japan. Characteristically, the titles of his books included: 'Love and Death. Stories from Japan'; 'In the Far East. On the Vulcanos of Japan'; 'The Love of the Samurai', etc. An analyst of Sieroszewski's body of work, Zdzisław Kempf came to a provocative conclusion: due to the predominance of the Japanese references, symbolism and philosophy at the heart of his novels, he could be interpreted as … a Japanese writer writing in Polish, rather than just a Polish writer writing about Japan.[35] It would be difficult to stress more suggestively the

importance of the Japanese cultural influence on one of the main Polish cultural figures of the first decades of the twentieth century. In the words of Zdzisław Kempf, Sieroszewski 'brilliantly explored the customs, history and literature of Japan, (…) he thought, felt and even saw in Japanese.'[36] According to Kempf's calculation, 84 per cent of the volume of Sieroszewski's prolific published output was devoted to the matters of the Far East (including Japan as well as Yakutia, China, and Korea).[37] Kempf concluded: 'The Far East is the artistic homeland of Sieroszewski's soul.'[38]

Aleksander Janta-Połczyński and Maksymilian Maria Kolbe: Liberal and anti-liberal views of Japan

The turbulent events of the Great War in Europe (1914–18), which was largely fought on the Polish territory, as well as the subsequent excitement of Poland's newly regained independence in 1918, followed by territorial disputes and wars around its borders (1918–1921), as well as domestic political turmoil, overshadowed the previous mass interest in East Asia and Japan once again seemed more distant to Polish public opinion. Some other figures however, kept the flame of Polish interest in Japan burning. These included the liberal journalist and poet Aleksander Janta-Połczyński and the hardline missionary priest Maksymilian Maria Kolbe. Both of them might be said to represent polar opposites of the Polish cultural-political spectrum, both of them can be considered witnesses and victims of the tragic history of the (Polish and global) twentieth century. In both cases, they spent some years in the ever-changing Japan of the 1930s, absorbed the experiences which in turn had an impact on them in their future lives and on their legacies.

As a young man in the 1930s, Aleksander Janta-Połczyński was already one of the most-travelled journalists of his generation. As one of the first foreign journalists he travelled extensively across the Soviet Union (he reportedly refused a subsequent offer to tour Nazi Germany). By the end of the decade he had lived on four continents and his journalistic accomplishments included unique interviews with some of the outstanding figures of the era, including Franklin D. Roosevelt, Charlie Chaplin, Josephine Baker, Thomas Mann, Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore as well as Haile Selasie (the emperor of Ethopia), Bao Dai (the emperor of Annam/Vietnam), and Pu-I (the former emperor of China, later the ruler of Japanese-dominated Manchuria).[39] Janta-Połczyński spent a big part of the decade travelling across East Asia and for several years in the late 1930s served as the correspondent of the Polish newspaper 'Gazeta Polska' in Tokyo. It was in itself characteristic that a Polish paper, closely linked to the then government, maintained a permanent correspondent's office in Japan (apparently as the only country in Asia). This could be explained by the links existing between certain key members the Polish state elite and Japan which had been forged since 1904 and which continued on different levels well into the 1930s and 1940s, especially between the two countries' intelligence services, even when both states found themselves on opposing sides of World War II. Janta-Połczyński became close to the Japanese establishment, as illustrated by a very special photo taken in 1936 portraying the entire cabinet of ministers of the Empire of Japan posing with the 28-year old Polish correspondent.[40] He was also well ingrained in the expat scene, for example he struck a friendship with a German correspondent Richard Sorge with whom he embarked on a joint expedition to Mongolia.[41] Janta-Połczyński's friendship with Sorge inspired the former's short story 'Dzieje drugiego dna' (The story of a hidden agenda), published in 1965.[42] Janta also travelled to the Sakhalin, searching the traces of Bronisław Piłsudski's stay among the Ainu four decades earlier. He managed to meet with members of the still-existing Polish community on the island.[43]

The stay in Japan had a profound influence on the Polish journalist and poet who became especially inspired by the philosophy of Japanese Buddhism and the aesthetics of Japanese art.

His reports from Japan were published on the pages of books such as 'Made in Japan' (1935) and 'Na kresach Azji' (On the outskirts of Asia, 1939).

In 1939, Janta published his translations of short stories of the 17th-century Japanese author Ihara Saikaku. Over the years, he translated and published anthologies of Japanese poetry (the translations were later collected in 'Godziny dzikiej kaczki', The hours of a wild goose, in 1966)[44] as well as wrote his own poems inspired by Japan, e.g. 'Tokyo' (1935). The depth of his enthusiasm for Japanese cultural legacy can be illustrated by the fact that some copies of his volume 'Serce na Wschód', A Heart to the East (1938) where printed, according to the publisher's note 'on the Japanese paper called Gatsumei, "the light of the moon", produced in Japan in the villages located around the Togakusiyama mountain, from the tree Bruossonetia Kazimoki Sieb' and the book contained carefully selected Japanese artwork.[45] In his own poems he wrote, e.g.: 'I learnt the art of life, as a great symphony/in Japan, the most beautiful country under the sun.'[46]

At considerable expense, Janta-Połczyński transported from Japan to Poland a large stone sculpture of Guanyin (Kannon), a Buddhist 'goddess of mercy' (whom he compared to Virgin Mary in the Polish Catholic tradition) which was placed in his home estate at Komorza. During the German Nazi invasion of Poland the sculpture was hidden from the occupiers in a neighbouring forest and never found again despite efforts to uncover it decades after the war (the search continued as late as in 1989).[47]

Janta-Połczyński's embrace of Asian culture was in line with his principled anti-racist and humanist stance and an unorthodox commitment to intercultural dialogue and understanding which he promoted throughout his prolific life. In 1937 he edited a special issue devoted to Japanese culture, of Wiadomości Literackie, the culturally and politically significant, standard-bearing weekly of the Polish liberal intelligentsia. Many of his writings prior to 1939 contained pacifist warnings against a forthcoming world war, some of them directly inspired by the events in East Asia. In 1939–45, Janta-Połczyński fought against the Nazis as a member of Polish armed forces and resistance movements on several fronts of World War II.

Since the 1940s Janta-Połczyński lived as an emigree in the USA (where he died in 1974), but in 1957, after almost two decades, he managed to visit Japan again, as a member of the Polish exiled writers' delegation to an international conference of PEN-Club.

Maksymilian Maria Kolbe represents a different way of engaging with Japan. Born in a humble household to an ethnic German father and a Polish mother in the central Polish region of Lodz, as a Catholic priest (a member of the Franciscan order) he was educated in the Vatican and became known for his role in building up Catholic media in Poland using the modern technology of mass-circulation newspapers and radio. Kolbe's media empire had many characteristic features of the Catholic Church in Poland in the 1920s and 1930s, including authoritarianism, radical anti-liberalism, nationalism, antisemitism, conspiracy theories, and a general lack of tolerance for social diversity.

In 1930, he left Poland with an ambition to establish an international missionary operation in Asia: first in China, then Japan. Fr Kolbe, with a handful of Polish and Japanese helpers, managed to create a small Franciscan monastery in Nagasaki (the traditional centre of Christianity in Japan) and his own Japanese-language publication, too.[48] One of Kolbe's Polish collaborators wrote from Nagasaki in 1934:

> 'Observing the religious movement of the local society, one has the impression the day of salvation for Japan is approaching. The religion of the cult of forefathers is visibly losing its supporters, especially the intelligentsia tends to accept the Christian religion, although they usually do not differentiate between the Catholics and the Protestants. The Protestants are harming Christ's idea through their false teachings and a non-Christian way of life. Despite everything, the dawn is appearing over Japan. Virgin Mary is taking this noble nation under her protection.'[49]

Despite such hopes, overall the mission of spreading Kolbe's firebrand version of Catholicism and creating a mass movement in Japan on the lines of the Polish example was not hugely successful. Of course he was not the only or the first Christian missionary who unsuccessfully

attempted to 'baptize' Japan over the centuries. Kolbe returned to Poland in 1936 (the Franciscan centre he established in Nagasaki, known as Mugenzai no Sono, exists until today). In 1940, he was arrested by the German Nazi occupiers as part of repressions against the Catholic clergy in Poland and was sent to the notorious concentration camp at Auschwitz. Heroically, he volunteered to sacrifice his life in order to save a fellow prisoner and died on 14 August 1941. Over the next decades, he became a symbol of the Polish martyrology during the Nazi occupation and he was canonized as a saint of the Catholic Church by Pope John Paul II in 1982. In many ways Kolbe can be considered as both a protagonist and, ultimately, a victim of the intolerant ideologies of the first half of the twentieth century.

While his mission in Japan in the 1930s could be considered a relative failure, there is no doubt he was influenced by the intercultural encounter and upon return to Poland he even introduced some Japanese customs to his Polish fellow-monks in the Franciscan centre known as Niepokalanow (the centre created by Kolbe was at the time the biggest Catholic monastery in Europe). According to eye-witnesses, Auschwitz survivors, he provided consolation to fellow inmates at the camp by telling them about his experiences of Japan and Japanese culture, a form of imaginary escape from the dire reality of brutal violence and starvation at the camp.[50]

Conclusion

As could be observed through the above mentioned examples, the interest in Japanese politics and culture was widespread in Poland in the first decades of the twentieth century. The champions of the Polish interest in Japan hailed from diverse walks of life and political orientations, from both the left and the right flank of the political spectrum. In some cases the interest was rooted in the experience of extensive travel and a deep knowledge of the culture of the Far East. When it comes to the general public, however, one may suspect the knowledge about Japan was at best superficial. Indeed, it seems the debates about the modernization of Japanese society mostly reflected Poland's own controversies about an appropriate national modernizing strategy, which would balance the requirements of modernity with tenets of national tradition. In the early twentieth century the key debates of Polish politics and culture revolved around issues of modernization and nationalism. Japan was in this context presented as an example of successful modernization, where Western and Eastern values co-existed in a supposedly harmonious manner. In this sense, the Polish discourses about Japan in the twentieth century tend to tell us much more about Poland than about Japan itself. The diverse Polish perspectives on the Japanese model provide a mirror in which different visions of national identity were reflected and played out.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Notes

1. Said, *Orientalism*.
2. From 1795 till 1918, Poland's territory was divided between Russian, Austrian and Prussian (German) rulers. The country became independent again from 1918 till 1939. From 1945 till 1989, the formally independent Polish state was ruled by a Communist regime imposed by the Soviet Union.
3. Górnicki, *Teraz już można. Ze wspomnien kulawego szerpy*, 190.
4. Tomczyk, 'Bushi-do – droga wojownika', 37.
5. Górnicki, *Teraz już można. Ze wspomnień kulawego szerpy*, 195–6.
6. Ibid., 196.
7. Ibid., 96.
8. Wowczuk, *Wyzwanie oświeconych samurajów*, 1.

9. Klassa, 'Obraz Japonii na łamach Tygodnika Ilustrowanego w latach 1859–1905', 247.
10. Ibid., 247–8.
11. Ibid., 254.
12. Ibid.
13. Klassa, 'Obraz Japonii na łamach Tygodnika Ilustrowanego w latach 1859–1905', 255.
14. Ibid., 258.
15. Tomczyk, 'Bushi-do – droga wojownika', 37. The terms 'kasztelan' and 'starosta' denoted regional representatives of legal and political authority in the historic Polish state. However, these approximations do not appear to be precise. In fact 'kasztelan' means 城主 (Zyoushu) in Japanese. 城 (zyou) means 'castle' and 主 (syu) means 'master.' The word bushi (a synonym of samurai, shizoku) has a nuance close to that of szlachta in Polish.
16. Gembal, *Aikido: Edukacja ciała i umysłu*, 43.
17. Wentzlowa, 'Przedmowa tłumacza', 6.
18. Ibid.
19. Interestingly, Okakura Kakuzo's other classic essay, 'The Book of Tea', originally published in English in 1906, was not published in Polish until many decades later, in 1986.
20. Krajewski, 'W służbie cesarza Mutsuhito', 75.
21. The contrast between, and the longevity of, Piłsudski's and Dmowski's visions of national identity is discussed, among others, in Pankowski, *The Populist Radical Right in Poland: The Patriots*.
22. Thanks to Professor Haruka Miyazaki, in September 2019 I had a chance to visit the Tokyo restaurant where the historic meeting of the Polish leaders had taken place.
23. Dmowski, *Przewrót*, 8.
24. Górnicki, *Teraz już można. Ze wspomnień kulawego szerpy*, 189. Górnicki did not list the names, but he probably meant Kazimierz Świtalski, Walery Sławek, Aleksander Prystor and Leon Kozłowski who had been active in Piłsudski's milieu before 1914.
25. Deja, *Polski japonizm literacki 1900–1939*, 124.
26. Ibid., 125.
27. Zeromski, 'Sen o szpadzie', 41.
28. Ibid.
29. Adamczyk, 'Uwagi wydawcy', 299. Jokohawa is the Polish spelling used in the original text, correct English variants include Yokokawa, Yokohama and Yokogawa.
30. Chociłowski, *Bronisława Piłsudskiego pojedynek z losem*, 51.
31. Bronislaw's younger brother Jozef Pilsudski was sentenced to five years' exile in Siberia in the same trial. Another participant of the plot, Alexandr Ulyanov (the older brother of Vladimir Ulyanov, a.k.a. Vladimir Lenin) was sentenced to death and subsequently executed (Pomper, *Lenin's Brother. The Origins of the October Revolution*).
32. There has been a number of relatively recent books with Bronisław Piłsudski's writings related to Japan, including Majewicz, *Japonia późnych lat okresu Meiji oczyma Bronisława Piłsudskiego*.
33. Majewicz, *Japonia późnych lat okresu Meiji oczyma Bronisława Piłsudskiego*, 278.
34. Dall, 'Zakopiańskie lata Bronisława Piłsudskiego (1906–1914)' 125.
35. Kempf, *Orientalizm Wacława Sieroszewskiego. Wątki japońskie*.
36. Ibid., 10.
37. Ibid., 12.
38. Ibid., 10.
39. Janta, *Lustra i reflektory*, 338–9.
40. Folega, *Życie na świat otwarte*: *Aleksander Janta-Połczyński*, 40.
41. In 1941, Sorge was exposed and arrested as a Soviet spy and hanged in 1944, see Whymant, *Stalin's Spy: Richard Sorge and the Tokyo Espionage Ring*.
42. Janta, *Flet i Apokalipsa*.
43. Folega, *Życie na świat otwarte*: *Aleksander Janta-Połczyński*, 30.
44. Janta, *Godzina dzikiej kaczki. Mala antologia poezji japońskiej*.
45. Palowski, *Aleksander Janta-Połczyński. Ballada o wiecznym szukaniu*, 32.
46. Janta, *Ściana milczenia*, quoted in Palowski, *Aleksander Janta-Połczyński. Ballada o wiecznym szukaniu*, 51. The autobiographical poem was written under dramatic circumstances of the war in 1943.
47. Palowski, *Ballada o wiecznym szukaniu*, 156–7.
48. Dyczewski, *Ten, który rozdał życie*, 21.
49. Czupryk, *Mugenzai no Sono*, 175–6.
50. Strzelecka, *Maksymilian Maria Kolbe*, 252.

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